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TAGS: PGOV PINS PTER PREL KDEM IZ
SUBJECT: SETTING THE SCENE FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN TUZ (SALAH AD DIN PROVINCE)

REF: BAGHDAD 2503

Classified By: PRT TEAM LEADER RICK BELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

Summary

¶2. (C) While the situation remains reasonably calm in the Tuz district of Salah ad Din province, background tension exists among the different ethnic groups present there. Even though Tuz is not formally a "disputed area," it is adjacent to Kirkuk, was separated from Kirkuk province in 1976, and has a similar ethnic mix. These facts render Tuz vulnerable to the effects of any instability in Kirkuk or any change in Kirkuk's administrative status. Poor delivery of services damages the credibility of the local and national government in the eyes of Tuz residents; this credibility gap creates space in which political groups can push destabilizing sectarian and ethnic agendas. The PRT expects the Kurds to have the most success in elections relative to their numbers, because their main parties run as one list. End Summary.

CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN TUZ

¶3. (SBU) Within Salah ad Din (SaD) province, Tuz is the district with the heaviest ethnic mix, including significant numbers of Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Sunni Turcomen, and Shia Turcomen. It has two sub-districts, Amerli and Suleiman Beg. Tuz was part of Kirkuk province until SaD was formed in 1976 as a mostly Sunni Arab province in Saddam Hussein's home area. Saddam's Arabization campaigns forcibly expelled many Kurds from Tuz as well as from Kirkuk. Tuz lies on the primary highway between Baghdad and Kirkuk. The Hamrin mountains form a natural barrier between Tuz and the rest of SaD, and the district's ethnic makeup only strengthens its ties to Kirkuk.

¶4. (C) While the situation remains reasonably calm, there is background tension among the different ethnic groups in Tuz. Non-Kurds resent and to some degree fear Kurdish ambitions and influence, while Shia Turcomen in Amerli sub-district have tense relations with Sunni Arabs. Tensions in neighboring Kirkuk and Khanaqin (in Diyala province) have not yet spilled over significantly to Tuz, but contribute to a general unease, exacerbated by a low-level insurgency combined with criminal activity, including kidnapping and murder. For example, September 1 saw two separate IED and VBIED attacks in Tuz city, against an IP investigating officer and an assistant judge. Since July 28 there have not been any explicit examples of ethnically-motivated violence; some commentators have suggested that an IED attack on September 12 may have deliberately targeted the PUK in Tuz, but the circumstances remain murky. It is no coincidence that the Suleiman Beg sub-district, with its relatively disenchanted Sunni Arab population, is the center of the insurgency in Tuz. The somewhat uncertain security situation contributes to a climate of fear and instability that

ethno-sectarian extremists could exploit.

KURDISH AMBITIONS

¶5. (C) While the PRT lacks detailed knowledge of the Kurdish areas of Tuz district, it is convinced the KRG is encouraging the return of Kurds who had been pushed out of Tuz during Saddam's Arabization campaigns. There are rumors of direct cash payments to repatriating Kurds and of ongoing activities by the Asayish (Kurdish intelligence service). The KRG provides at least some public services to majority-Kurdish areas, including a program involving teachers, and some Kurds work in the KRG while leaving their families behind in Tuz. All these activities lead to high anxiety about Kurdish ambitions among the non-Kurdish population, in particular the Turcomen.

ETHNOSECTARIAN TENSIONS

¶6. (C) Kurds and Sunni Arabs: In the PRT's experience, Sunni Arabs in Tuz generally say Tuz should remain part of Salah ad Din (and Kirkuk must be "an Iraqi city," i.e. not part of Kurdistan), while Kurds believe Tuz should become aligned with a Kurdish Kirkuk. Previous PRT reporting has indicated high levels of concern by Sunni Arabs in the rest of SaD over the possibility of Kurdish annexation of Tuz in the event that Kirkuk joins the KRG (ref A). There are tensions between local Kurds and a Sunni Arab IP QRF battalion that was recently deployed to Tuz by provincial authorities. (Note: There are legitimate reasons for the presence of the

Arab battalion: the district had been asking for an increased IP presence for some time. End Note.) Tensions also exist between Turcoman officers and the Kurdish rank-and-file in the Tuz IP force.

¶7. (C) Shia Amerli and Sunni Arabs: The Shia Turcoman town of Amerli has tense relations with the Sunni Arab villages in its sub-district. These tensions stem in large part from a July 2007 terrorist attack that killed 125 residents of Amerli and remains an enduring trauma in the town's collective psyche. This has led to accusations by Sunni Arab villagers that the Shia-dominated sub-district council ignores their needs. Sunni Arab visitors to Amerli town do face some harassment. Some Sunni Arabs also complain that Amerli Shiites are able to get resources from the GoI directly, while the Sunnis face relative neglect.

¶8. (C) Diversity among the Turcomen: Many Turcomen in Tuz are Shia and align themselves with national Shia parties (ISCI, Dawa, and some Sadrists), which dilutes the political strength of the Turcoman community.

¶9. (C) No Spillover from Kirkuk/Diyala: Tuz's relative stability manifested itself in the district's subdued reaction to the July 28 suicide bombing in Kirkuk. At a meeting of political party leaders convened by the local CF commander on August 7, all the speakers emphasized the importance of ethnic harmony and restraint. Even the most strident speech (from a KDP representative) made its arguments in the context of the Iraqi constitution, and called for a Kurdish government in Kirkuk that would still respect all ethnic groups (ref A). Local CF and the resident PRT representative have seen no overt evidence of ethnic tensions that might become serious flashpoints, aside from one unconfirmed report of a demonstration by the Iraqi Turcoman Front (ITF) in Tuz on July 29.

KIRKUK IS KEY

¶10. (C) Kirkuk remains the key variable in the future stability of Tuz. The PRT sees little likelihood that

tensions would boil up in Tuz without external stimulus. As long as Kirkuk remains stable, it is likely Tuz will also remain stable; if Kirkuk were to explode, Tuz would be affected to some degree.

POOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE

¶11. (C) Tuz district residents consistently complain of poor delivery of basic services from both the local and provincial levels of government. The district's geographic isolation and its distinctive character relative to the rest of the province contribute to at least some degree of provincial neglect. The situation will not improve when Tuz loses the disproportionately large share of Provincial Council seats it currently holds, which resulted from Sunni Arab boycotts of the 2005 provincial elections. The local PRT representative detects far more passion in most of his interlocutors' remarks on bread-and-butter topics such as electricity than on abstract political issues such as the fate of Kirkuk. Nevertheless, the population's disenchantment with the government creates space in which political groups can push destabilizing sectarian and ethnic agendas. Both the Iraqi Turcoman Front (ITF) and the main Kurdish parties have attempted to provide basic services and fill the legitimacy vacuum in Tuz.

TUZ AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

¶12. (SBU) The Tuz Chairmen of the Socialist Democratic Kurdistani Party (Abbas Mansur Karim) and the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (Hajji Shawan), told the PRT September 20 that their parties support the integration of Tuz into the KRG. Abbas objected to the use of the term "annexation," explaining that since Tuz was taken from Kirkuk in 1976, it is only natural that it should return to its original home (which they hope will join the KRG). The PRT attempted unsuccessfully to contact the Al Ikhwa Turkumani Party; according to several prominent Provincial Council members, this party is unknown in SaD and inconsequential.

¶13. (C) Dividing the district into its component pieces provides the best insight into which party or bloc will receive the most support in Tuz. In Tuz city proper, the parties have the most strength. Among the Kurds in the city, the PUK is strongest. Since Kurdish parties are running as one list in the election, the PRT expects them to garner the most votes province-wide. Among Shia Turcomen, ITF has a presence, but ISCI (generally referred to in Tuz as the Badr

Organization) is stronger in the city. There is also a small Dawa presence. There are Sadrists with a connection to a Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) cell in the district. Among the Sunni Arabs, the IIP is strongest within the city. Outside of Tuz city, the political dynamics are different. The KDP seems to have at least some strength in small Kurdish villages in the countryside. Among the Turcomen in outlying villages and towns, the ITF has significantly more strength than it does in Tuz city. In the Sunni Turcoman village of Yangija, the Shia Turcoman village of Bostamli, and the Shia Turcoman town of Amerli, the ITF has the upper hand, although the Shia parties have followings among the Shia Turcomen in the countryside. Furthermore, at least two Turcoman villages are actively hostile to the ITF, including the Sunni Turcoman village of Abbud.

¶14. (C) Among the Sunni Arabs outside of Tuz city, the influence of political parties becomes much reduced. In the southern part of the district around the village of Maftul in Amerli sub-district, Sheikh Sami has the most influence due to his role as an SOI contractor. In Suleiman Beg, the sub-district Director and various sheikhs, especially Faysal Razi Husayn, have the most influence, and none of them is affiliated with a party. Even in Amerli, with its

substantial ITF and ISCI presence, Sheikh Faruq Mustafa Qasim remains highly influential, based in large part on his tribal credentials.

TUZ POPULATION NUMBERS

¶15. (SBU) According to Public Distribution System (PDS) figures and input from local PRT contacts, the population of Tuz district is 157,000, with an ethnic breakdown of 39 percent Turcomen (more Shia than Sunni but both present), 36 percent Arab, 25 percent Kurd; it is possible that the Kurdish percentage could be understated, due to northern Kurdish villages being supported by the KRG, and perhaps being off the books of the PDS system. The Tuz sub-district has 96,000 people, of which the city accounts for 70 to 75,000; ethnic breakdown for the city is 40 percent Turcoman, 40 percent Kurdish, and 20 percent Arab. The population of Suleiman Beg town is 12,700 out of a sub-district population of 24,400, with ethnic breakdown for the town at 92 percent Sunni Arabs and 8 percent "Turcoman-speaking Arabs." The population of Amerli town is 10,400, out of a sub-district population of 37,700, with ethnic composition in town at 70 percent Shia Turcoman, 30 percent Sunni Turcoman and Arabs. According to a local source, there are a total of 48,604 registered voters in Tuz city.

KEY POLITICAL LEADERS IN TUZ

¶16. (S) The PRT representative in Tuz summarizes local leadership as follows:

- Talib Mohammad Mustafa Mahmood) Suleiman Beg Mudir (i.e. Sub-District Director) is the most important GOI figure in Suleiman Beg. A member of the Provincial Council, he has decent contacts with the provincial governor. He has possible links to insurgency according to classified intelligence reporting, but has had most of his family killed by insurgents. It is unclear if he's friend or foe, but either way, an important figure in Tuz.

- Tuz Qaimmaqam (i.e. District Chief Executive or "Mayor") Mohammad Rasheed Raouf: PUK, corrupt, ineffective, but he is still the Qaimmaqam.

- District Council Chairman Qadir Ali Saleh: An IIP member, Sunni Arab, vaguely technocratic, he seems to be reasonably well respected.

- District Council Deputy Chairman Ali Hashem Salman: Badr (ISCI), Shia Turcoman.

- Sheikh Husayn Awad Khalaf: One of two SOI contractors, Sunni Arab, hostile to GOI.

- Amerli Sub-district Council Chairman Salah Murshid Ahmed: Turcoman Shia, unknown party affiliation, important Amerli figure.

- Sheikh Faruq Mustafa Kassim: Shia Turcoman, most important sheikh in Amerli sub-district, possibly more important locally than Sub-District Council Chairman Salah.

- Sheikh Sami Husayn Sultan: SOI contractor based in Maftul, a Sunni Arab village in Amerli sub-district. Feuds with Sheikh Faruq, and seen by some as an upstart pretender to the title of Sheikh. Probably venal; undeniably influential due

in large part to his SOI contract.

- Sheikh Faysal Razi Husayn: Little interaction with Americans, but probably the most influential sheikh in Suleiman Beg.

The supposed head of the PUK in Tuz is Akram Ali, and of the KDP is Arksalan Ali, but the PRT cannot assess how influential they are.

COMMENT

¶17. (C) Despite the district's many problems, the situation in Tuz remains relatively calm and subdued, and in the absence of a sharp external stimulus in the form of security problems in Kirkuk or Khanaqin, it should stay that way. However, in terms of commercial connections, ethnic makeup, proximity, and historical links, Tuz sits very much in Kirkuk's orbit, and any major instability in Kirkuk will unavoidably affect Tuz.
CROCKER